

LAOS

NEW YORK TIMES

18 MAR 71

LAOTIANS DRIVEN FROM VITAL BASE

Lose Post Used for Actions Against Foe's Supply Trail

By HENRY KAMM

Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, March 10

The Laotian military command announced today the loss of a base that is vital for harassment and surveillance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in the southern panhandle.

Laotian troops were driven last night from a post known as Position 22 and from three smaller posts on the eastern edge of the Boloven Plateau after two days of bombardment by rockets, mortars and recoilless rifles and ground attacks.

The plateau is 80 miles south of the Tchepone area, where South Vietnamese troops are operating.

[Reports from Saigon said heavy fog was hampering United States helicopter support of the South Vietnamese attack on the enemy supply-trail complex and also was cutting down on ground fighting.]

Military sources reported that the defenders of the Boloven Plateau positions — three battalions of so-called strategic guerrilla units — had retreated in relatively good order, taking about 50 wounded with them.

No reports were available on the number of Laotian troops killed because enemy fire destroyed the base communication center before the withdrawal.

Strategic guerrilla units — which normally have about 300 men to a battalion — are part of the irregular army sponsored by the United States. In addition, the United States underwrites the budget of the regular military force, the Royal Laotian Army.

The fall of Position 22 leaves the Government without a base on the eastern edge of the strategic plateau. From there, surveillance and raids could be carried out by the guerrilla units against Route 16, the principal western branch of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The loss of the base presumably reduces the amount of intelligence on trail traffic that has guided the United States Air Force in its missions against the trail.

Control of Plateau Threatened

Position 22 had been the strongest Laotian base in the area, and its loss is a threat to the Government's hold over the plateau, which is the dominant terrain feature in the southern panhandle.

The base had been under heavy pressure since last December, but a strong ground attack then was beaten off.

American and Laotian planes were reported in action during the last battle.

The deteriorating Government position in the south may be a result of a North Vietnamese reaction to South Vietnam's operation in the Tchepone region. Meanwhile, Government fortresses in northern Laos appeared to be more stable.

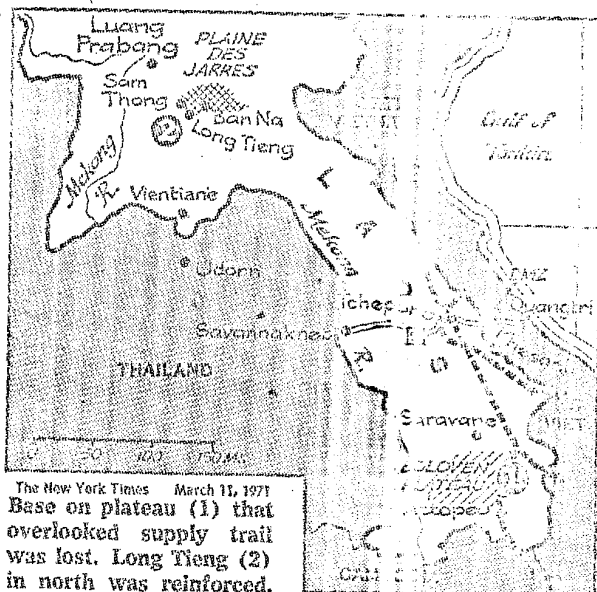
Despite heavy enemy pressure in the area of Long Tieng, the principal base of the irregular army of mountain tribesmen commanded by Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, optimism is growing that the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces can be held off there until the monsoon rains starting in May or June halt enemy offensive activities.

Thai Troops in Action

At least four battalions of Thai troops, in addition to three battalions from the northern panhandle, have augmented General Vang Pao's battle-weary forces of Meo and Lao Theung (Mountain Lao) tribesmen.

The Thai troops, whose presence in Laos is officially denied, are occupying strong defensive positions around Long Tieng, notably at Ban Na and Sam Thong to the northeast.

The Thai troops are reliably reported to be under the operational command of General Vang Pao but are led by their own officers, reportedly including two generals.



The soldiers are wearing their normal uniforms but without insignia or other identifying markings.

The Thai troops are supplied separately from the Laotian units from the Thai Air Force base at Udorn, which is operated by the United States Air Force. Their supplies reach the Thais daily by planes operated

by Air America and Continental Air Services, companies under contract to the Central Intelligence Agency for the transport and supply of the United States-sponsored Laotian irregulars. Thai supplies are distributed from a separate supply facility at Long Tieng.

It is believed that the United States is financing the Thai

participation in the war in Laos as it does in South Vietnam.

Thai military units have been reported active in northern Laos for some time. The infantry battalions were said to have been rushed in about a year ago, after heavy enemy pressure brought about the evacuation of the civilian population center of Sam Thong.

Long Tieng appeared to be most heavily bombed last month. The base remains vulnerable to an estimated total of 16 North Vietnamese divisions.

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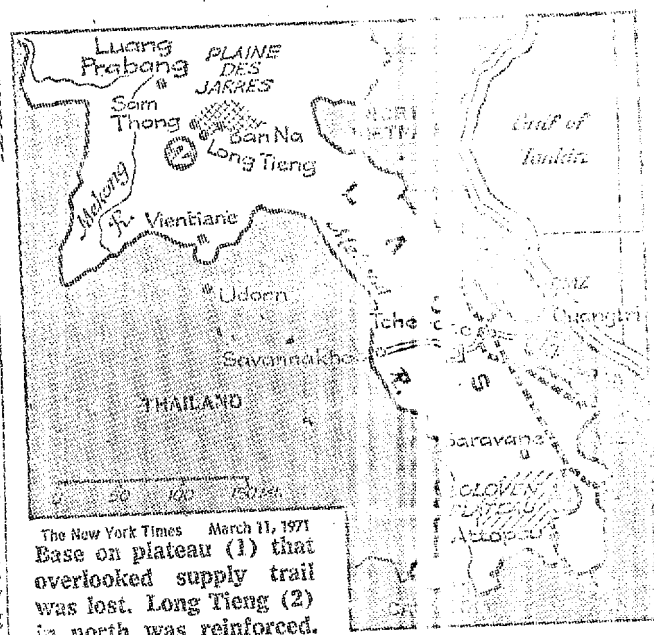
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Long Tieng appeared to be a key heavily defended last point before the main trail entered Laos.

LAOS

WASHINGTON POST

11 MAR 1971

14,000 Noncombatants From China Are in Laos

By George C. Wilson
Washington Post Staff Writer

Red China still has some 14,000 troops in Laos and a small number in North Vietnam but shows no sign of sending them into action, Pentagon sources said yesterday.

The Chinese contingent in northern Laos includes five regiments of antiaircraft troops, according to latest intelligence estimates. But it is doubtful that the regiments are at their usual strength of about 800 men each.

These antiaircraft personnel, while they could be used with profit by Hanoi in southern Laos right now, are guarding a road China is building up north. It runs from China into Laos and toward northeast Thailand.

For fear of provoking China to taking a more active role in the Indochina war, U.S. planes have avoided bombing the Chinese road still under construction.

As for North Vietnam itself, the Pentagon characterized the Chinese troop presence there as "negligible" now.

At the height of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, about 40,000 Chinese troops were believed there to repair damage. Most of those labor battalions left after President Johnson stopped the bombing on Nov. 1, 1968.

A portion of the Chinese force in North Vietnam went to northern Laos. The antiaircraft personnel are near Muong Sai in Laos.

"It has always been a question whether the Chinese in northern Laos are licensees or trespassers," said one military

official. Thailand is nervously eyeing the Chinese road and troops along it, according to some American officials.

But as for China entering the war in South Vietnam or the Laotian panhandle, the Pentagon line is that this looks doubtful. The current South Vietnamese drive along Route 9 in Laos is south of the 17th parallel, considered a first-line firebreak to prevent provoking the Chinese into military action.

The Chinese did install some new communications equipment in North Vietnam recently. But even that is not regarded by administration officials as a response to the allied drive into Laos.

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird in his posture statement Tuesday said the Chinese would risk having their supply lines cut off if they sent soldiers into battle far beyond their borders.

For the moment, then, administration officials believe Peking's promise to give more aid to Hanoi in the Indo-China war means, equipment—not "volunteers" marching south from China. Last year, according to informed sources, China gave \$180 million in aid to North Vietnam.

Pentagon officials stress that North Vietnam in the past has been chary of the Chinese military—buttressing Nixon administration assertions that yesterday's joint communique by Hanoi and Peking is nothing to be alarmed about.

25 FEB 1971

(Laos) Gets Military Aid From Thai Volunteers

Vientiane Government Spokesmen Admit Presence; Thousands Believed Involved

BY ARTHUR J. DOMMEN

Times Staff Writer

VIENTIANE—The Laotian government is receiving increasing help from ethnic Lao volunteers from northeast Thailand, official sources here say.

The volunteers, who already are believed to number several thousand, are enrolled in Laotian forces and wear Laotian army uniforms.

They have shown up in the defense of key points against the Communists such as the base at Long Cheng in northern Laos and the half of the Bolovens Plateau still in Laotian government hands in southern Laos.

Their presence is undoubtedly a valuable asset for the Vientiane government. The longer-term implications for Laos of having numbers of military men whose primary allegiance is to Thailand are beginning to cause uneasiness here.

Popular Resentment

As was the case with South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, the volunteers from Thailand in Laos have to face popular resentment that goes back to the history of conquests across a political border that was determined by French colonial rule.

Their profile in Laos has therefore been kept deliberately low by the government of Thailand.

Nevertheless, charges of Thai troops fighting in Laos figure prominently in statements by the Pathet Lao faction in Laos and by Hanoi and Peking. Such charges go back 10 years.

The presence of the volunteers from Thailand is officially admitted by spokesmen of both the Vientiane and Bangkok governments.

Laotian Premier Prince Souvanna Phouma said in an interview 10 days ago that "as long as they speak Lao, we consider them to be Laotians."

There are an estimated 6 million Lao-speaking people living in northeast Thailand, about six times as many as there are within Laos itself, and it requires a real specialist to be able to distinguish an inhabitant from the right bank of the Mekong from one from the left bank.

One person who claims to be able to make the distinction is Soth Petrasy, permanent representative of the Pathet Lao faction in Vientiane, who is a Lao born in Vientiane.

Soth said in an interview three days ago that he had received reports of truckloads of soldiers from Thailand in Laotian army uniforms heading for the airport here, from where they were presumably flown upcountry in American aircraft.

The appearance of volunteers from Thailand in the towns of Laos such as Vientiane is a rarity. Normally they are flown direct from training camps in Thailand to the battle fronts. The Thai government, for several years has provided training facilities for units of the Laotian army under a financial arrangement incorporated into the American military assistance program in Laos, which is administered by the American military mission in Bangkok.

Several of the Laotian generals maintain close personal relations with members of the Thai government. Gen. Vang Pao, commander of Laos'

cently visited training bases during one of his frequent visits to Bangkok. Many of the Thai volunteers are being sent to Vang Pao's command to fill gaps in the ranks of the Meo tribesmen created by the attrition of the 10-year-old war there.

Allows Exiles

Thailand also allows a number of exiled Laotian officers to reside in its territory. These include Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, the former leader of the rightist faction in Laos, and Gen. Thao Ma, the former commander of the Royal Laotian Air Force. Both escaped from Laos after coup attempts.

Last Dec. 10 the Thai governor of Nakhorn Phanom Province was reported to have arrested another Laotian exiled officer living in Thailand for the last five years. Col. Bounleuth Saycoole, as the latter was preparing to cross the Mekong to the town of Savannakhet with a small force of Thai mercenaries to stage a rightist coup against Premier Prince Souvanna Phouma.

Thailand's interest in allowing its nationals to volunteer for military duty in Laos is believed to extend beyond reasons of anti-Communist solidarity or any financial benefits that such an arrangement brings the Thai government.

Laos is for Thailand the geographical hinterland, and the prospect of having a relatively powerful foreign country in control of Laos has historically been feared in Bangkok.

Just as the Thai government gave active assistance to the Laotian independence movement against France in 1945 and 1946, so the Thai government today affords assistance to the Laotian government against the superior power of North Vietnam. The Thai government recognizes that if the Pathet Lao, backed by North Vietnam, obtained the use of secure

the Mekong, the right bank and with it the whole northeast of Thailand would be in danger of a revolutionary war forced from without.

The Thai government's relations with Laotian generals favoring a more rightist policy are a potent factor in persuading Souvanna to accept Thai volunteers in Laos.

Up to now these volunteers have seen action in the hill areas of Laos still relatively distant from the Mekong Valley. However, observers believe that should the Mekong Valley towns themselves be threatened by a North Vietnamese advance, Thailand would be tempted to occupy them preemptively in order to safeguard its own security.

Lao Military Cite Role Of Americans in Combat

By TAMMY ARBUCKLE

Special to The Star

VIENTIANE, Laos — The United States has an important command role as well as a ground combat role in Laos, Lao military and other well-informed sources say.

Lao military sources from the rank of general in Vientiane down to captains and majors say it is Central Intelligence Agency officials who command in the Long Chieng second military region headquarters 75 miles north of here. The Long Chieng commander is the station chief of the agency, these sources say. The chain of command goes back to Udorn in northeast Thailand.

"It's the Americans who give the orders," a high-ranking Lao insists. Udorn is informed of events in the second military region before army headquarters in Vientiane, Lao sources say. Meo Gen. Vang Pao is there to lead the Meo tribesmen but Americans give the directions, Lao military men say. The American ground role is small, limited to less than 200 men throughout Laos. Their role is principally advisory but these Americans are in combat. Meos call them "commando leaders," and say they have been based at Pakkao near Long Cheng.

Laotians who visited the area show pictures of Americans in camouflage fatigues carrying weapons. These Americans lead

small teams to gather intelligence in Hanoi's rear or to destroy parts of the North Vietnamese communications and command system in North Laos. These teams have been particularly successful with American participation along Route 7 between the North Vietnam border and the Plain of Jars. The Americans concerned are military men paid by the CIA.

In addition Laotians from the second military region report Americans arrive for special missions of sabotage then depart from Laos immediately after the missions are accomplished. These groups which are believed to belong to the U.S. Air Force commandos flying from Nakhon Phanom in northeast Thailand land at the airstrip near Long Cheng tightly guarded by Meos.

Americans killed in ground action in Laos are put in the Southeast Asia death totals and do not appear in Saigon briefing figures. Americans say over 30 Americans killed in North Laos fall into this combat category.

Well-informed sources say over 90 Americans have been killed in clandestine operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in south Laos. These operations include not only intelligence gathering but harassment. These U.S. ground operations in Laos in the trail area are continuing

with both South Vietnamese and Lao special guerrilla units.

The Laos ground operation under CIA aegis is described as useful by U.S. sources. They say two divisions of North Vietnamese have been tied down by the U.S. teams in northern Laos at the expense of a few American lives, though there have been high Meo tribe losses. "It's a sort of early Vietnamization type program," sources said.

Unfortunately with renewed Hanoi pressure and high losses the scheme is now backfiring. The Meos are starting to say they are tired of dying for the Americans. Frantic Vang Pao, angry at not getting Lao reinforcements, allegedly told the Lao, "Don't think my people are going to stay and die for the Americans." This threat led to American commanders calling for Thai troops to reinforce Long Cheng. The fact that Americans command at Long Cheng means the United States will get the blame for any major North Vietnamese victory there.

A desperate Central Intelligence Agency free from press surveillance in its military operations in north Laos, some sources believe, could well suck the United States into deeper involvement there in an attempt to retain the Long Cheng headquarters and the agency's operational capability in northern

18 FEB 1971

The Washington Merry-Go-Round**CIA Life in SE Asia Is Not All Intrigue****By Jack Anderson**

The popular impression of CIA men in Southeast Asia is of lean-faced James Bonds talking in whispers to Indo-chinese beauties in dingy bars or of bearded guerrilla experts directing Meo tribesmen in the Laotian jungles.

The real McCoy, more often, is a rumpled civil servant going to lard, who worries about when his refrigerator will arrive from the States and plays bingo on Tuesday nights.

This is the unromantic picture that emerges from an instruction sheet handed to CIA pilots leaving for Udorn, Thailand. The CIA uses a front called Air America to fly missions out of Udorn over Indochina.

Instead of pressing cyanide suicide capsules upon new recruits, the stateside briefer slips them a bus schedule for CIA personnel between Udorn's CIA compound, schools and banks.

"A bowling alley in Udorn has league bowling," the CIA confides to its pilot-agents. Their wives are given such hush-hush CIA tips as "water should be boiled three to five minutes prior to drinking, but it is safe for cooking and washing dishes of it is brought to the boiling point."

The cloak-and-dagger boys are told they will have a su-

permarket, swimming pool, free movies, the "Club Rendez-vous" (which doubles as a chapel on Sundays) and bingo on Tuesday and Saturday nights. The CIA bars are called The Pub and the Wagon Wheel and shut down at midnight.

The same humdrum life style can be found at such CIA outposts as Vientiane, Laos, where CIA men usually live with their families in villas and dine at the town's few French restaurants.

One lonely CIA flier, who had left his family in Florida, worried about their safety after reading about racial demonstrations at home. "I'm going to bring them out here where it's safe," he confided solemnly to my associate Les Whitten in Vientiane last summer.

But if the CIA living conditions are vintage suburbia, some of the missions are dangerous. The CIA pilots fly supplies to CIA-backed Meo tribesmen in Laos hinterlands. There are also more hazardous missions, such as flights along the Red Chinese border and ammo deliveries to tiny airstrips in Communist-infested country.

Footnote: Much of the recruiting for CIA pilots is done out of a modern, gold-carpeted office in downtown Washington with "Air America" on the glass doors. One of my report-

ers, posing as a pilot, was interviewed by H. H. Dawson, a beefy man in shirt sleeves. He said prospects were dim right now, because the number of fixed-wing pilots had been cut back from 600 to 500.

Dawson said the basic pay is \$22.98 an hour for captains, \$13.93 for first officers, with bonuses for special "projects." A top CIA pilot can make as much as \$100,000 a year flying high hazard missions. In addition, station allowances run \$320 a month at Saigon, \$215 at Udorn and \$230 in Vientiane.

LXOS

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CAPITOL STUFF

By JERRY GREENE

Washington, Feb. 15.—When an American aircraft through error of some sort dumped bombs on friendly forces at the Long Cheng base in Laos with resultant casualties and materiel damage, the explosion also blew off a little more cover from the supposedly secret CIA war in the jungle-covered mountains.

News dispatches from Vientiane, the Laotian capital, described Long Cheng variously as "American headquarters" in Northern Laos or as the operating base for assorted undercover activities of the Central Intelligence Agency.

In view of the stepped-up fighting in the Long Cheng area and the celebrated Plain of Jars, and the domestic flap which has brought repeated White House denials that American ground combat troops are involved in the South Vietnamese invasion along Highway 9, this is as good a time as any for a little further clarification.

CIA Director Richard Helms and his "spooks" in the field have got considerable attention for their operations in Laos in the last four or five years, but they have not been running any little private war of their own. Nor has the Laos war been much of a secret to anybody.

There are about 100 CIA agents in all of Laos. They include men who are experts in guerrilla warfare, in sabotage, in counter-insurgency operations, in surveillance and in military training. They are under the direct control of the American ambassador in Vientiane, and follow orders which are approved by the National Security Council in Washington.

Back in the 1961-62 period, the CIA, as well as the Army's Special Forces—the Green Berets—were active in Laos, engaged in surveillance and training operations in support of the royal government. Then, after the Geneva agreement in 1962 creating the troika "neutral" government in Laos, the Americans pulled out.

Some of the spooks may have remained behind. We wouldn't know. But they would have been very difficult to hide in the Laotian population, for the Americans have different colored faces and they are, as a rule, a foot or more taller than the Laotian people.



Richard Helms
Not running a private war

But a year later, when it was obvious that the North Vietnamese neither had pulled out nor had any intention of pulling out their thousands of regular troops, and fighting was continuing, Vientiane again asked American help. The CIA returned, in small numbers.

While other agencies of the U. S. government are charged with monitoring foreign broadcasts and code-breaking, and while these electronic intelligence duties, of enormous extent and cost, are on a global basis, the CIA does handle local, specific radio interception jobs. Such work would be done in Laos, within easy radio listening range of Hanoi and the North Vietnamese armed forces in the south.

They Made Arrangements With The Hill Men

Over the years, the CIA has established an excellent rapport with the Meo tribesmen, the poor hill farmers who didn't get along very well anyhow with the flatlanders in the cities and around the royal throne.

There were, and are, little pockets of the Meo people scattered all over the mountains; the CIA fed them rice, and supplied them with weapons and training. The spooks used the famed Air America flying company which, contrary to widespread belief, is not a CIA unit but a commercial company, doing business under contract. The American Embassy uses Air America, and so does AID, also by contract.

The Meo proved to be excellent fighters; they didn't like the North Vietnamese nor their Pathet Lao (i.e., Communist) associates, and the tribesmen were adept at harassment and interdiction.

Somewhere along the line, the CIA ran into Vang Pao, a tribal chief who was a leader of remarkable ability, who rallied the hill people around his banner and with a relatively moderate flow of American supplies turned his men into a tough little army. Vang Pao, a patriot, got to be so good at his fighting job that the Laotian government finally commissioned him a general and made him the commander of the region around the Plain of Jars.

Long Cheng was selected by Vang Pao as his major base several years ago, and he had CIA communications experts and advisers at hand. But about a year ago, he decided to decentralize. He separated his troops and scattered them around a number of smaller bases; Long Cheng lost its pre-eminence.

He's Got Only a Few Thousand Men

Vang Pao's immediate army consists of about 3,000 to 3,600 men; he doubtless could muster several thousand more in a pinch.

The Meo Tribesmen have raised a lot of hell with the North Vietnamese over the last couple of years in purely guerrilla operations. In the dry season, the North Vietnamese push forward with the Meos snapping at their flanks; when the rains come the Hanoi invaders pull back. Some of the towns and villages have changed hands fairly frequently.

Now, the North Vietnamese have a fresh division in the Plain of Jars area and it would appear that a battle of some consequence is in the making.

All these matters have been fairly open knowledge and the full details are known to four subcommittees of Congress, the Budget Bureau and the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board as well as the National Security Council. It's a skimpily concealed secret.

16 FEB 1971

CIA-led guerrillas in Laos?

By Daniel Southerland

*Special correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor*

Saigon

Tribal guerrillas trained, financed, and led by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) are aiding the South Vietnamese in their drive into Laos, according to well-informed sources.

The sources say more than two thousand of these guerrillas, most of them Kha tribesmen, were brought into areas southwest of Sépône in southern Laos when the South Vietnamese began their invasion just over a week ago.

Many of the U.S. armed tribesmen are natives of the Ho Chi Minh Trail area. They had recently been harassing and interdicting North Vietnamese supply lines near the Lao-Cambodian border. Then from Pakse, about 110 miles southwest of Sépône, they moved into the area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail between Sépône and Muong Phine, located about 20 miles southwest of Sépône.

Harassment charged

The sources say the CIA-supported guerrillas, working in small teams, are being used to harass North Vietnamese rear elements to the southwest of Sépône.

Sépône is at the center of a key North Vietnamese base area designated 604 and appears to be one of the main targets of the South Vietnamese troops now pushing into Laos. Supply trails and roads belonging to the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex converge in this area, and large quantities of supplies are transferred here for movement farther south.

The CIA and the U.S. Army's Special Forces have recruited Kha tribesmen as far back as seven years ago. The guerrilla bands are well armed and supplied by helicopters. To lead them, the CIA frequently employs former U.S. Special Forces soldiers with experience in Vietnam.

Probes aided by U.S.

Vietnamese sources say CIA and Special Forces-led guerrilla teams were involved in helping the South Vietnamese make probes into southern Laos late last year in preparation for the big offensive into Laos which started Feb. 8.

Being at home in the mountains of southern Laos, the Kha guerrillas are capable of carrying out reconnaissance missions and acting as guides for conventional units.

Thus, when U.S. officials insist there are no American ground combat troops involved in the current drive into Laos, they studiously neglect to mention the small

groups of Americans who have been directing clandestine actions there for years. In Laos, the CIA—rather than the regular American military establishment—has played the main military role.

Tribal forces supported

It is the CIA which supports the predominantly tribal forces of the Lao Government in northern Laos, whose headquarters at Leng Cheng is now coming under heavy North Vietnamese pressure. Long Cheng hit the headlines again Sunday, when a U.S. jet fighter-bomber accidentally dropped a bomb on government troops, killing 10 and wounding 20 of them.

Some sources estimated that more than 300 CIA men, many of them former Special Forces soldiers, are involved in Laos, supplying and training government guerrillas and leading commando and reconnaissance teams.

In addition to the CIA men, other Americans with military roles on the ground in Laos are the more than 70 military attaches working under the U.S. embassy in the Vientiane and the Army's Special Forces teams, which work primarily in the Ho Chi Minh Trail area.

There is nothing new in all this, of course. Such American involvement in Laos goes back a number of years.

C.I.A. BASE IN LAOS, REPORTED BOMBED

U.S. Planes Said to Attack Compound in Error

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 14 (AP)—Reliable sources said today that American planes mistakenly bombed a United States Central Intelligence Agency base in Laos, causing heavy casualties and damage.

The informants, in Vientiane, Laos, said that United States Air Force F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers had been trying to drive back a North Vietnamese attack when their bombs dropped on the secret C.I.A. compound and airstrip at the Long Tieng base. The base, 78 miles northwest of Vientiane, is the headquarters of Gen. Vang Pao's guerrilla army.

The sources said that the American barracks had burned down and at least one American agent had been wounded. Other bombs reportedly started fires in the town of Long Tieng.

Bombs Dropped in Error

The United States Command in Saigon said it had no comment on the report. Although the fighter-bombers came from bases in Thailand, they are under the tactical control of the United States Seventh Air Force in South Vietnam.

A week ago, a United States Navy fighter-bomber mistakenly dropped scores of bombs the size of hand grenades on South Vietnamese troops massed along the border for the drive into Laos. Six men were killed and 51 wounded.

The fighter-bomber was apparently diving to attack North Vietnamese positions on the Laotian side of the border when the cluster bomb dropped prematurely, falling on forward positions of the South Vietnamese.

The situation at Long Tieng, the keystone of Laotian defenses in the north central section of the country, appeared worsening. General Vang Pao made an urgent trip to Vientiane to seek reinforcements but was reported turned down.

The American bombers were called in after North Vietnamese troops launched heavy rocket, mortar and ground assaults against the base. Some of the attackers penetrated the perimeter.

Reports from Vientiane said elements of at least two North Vietnamese divisions, totaling about 6,000 troops, had surrounded Long Tieng.

Civilians Flee Town

General Vang Pao is reported to have about 6,000 Meo tribesmen under his command in the Long Tieng area and two Thai artillery batteries. Reliable sources estimated that at least 20,000 refugees had streamed south from Long Tieng in anticipation of heavy fighting.

General Vang Pao is reported to be wondering whether to make a last-ditch stand at Long Tieng or to withdraw into the hills.

In southern Laos, other United States bombers roamed across the east-west axis of the Ho Chi Minh trail attacking North Vietnamese mountain hideouts overlooking Route 9 on the approaches to the town of Sepone.

Elsewhere in Indochina, North Vietnamese gunners fired nearly 100 mortar shells into the night bivouac of a South Vietnamese unit seven miles northeast of Suong, along Route 7.